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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: THE DYNAMICS OF PARTISAN POLITICS:
SCEPTICAL VIEWS ON IBB'S POLITICAL UTOPIA

REF: (A) LAGOS 15948 (B) LAGOS 15697

¶1. SUMMARY: DURING A WEEK-LONG TRIP TO BENUE AND GONGOLA STATES, CONGEN QUERIED BUSINESSMEN, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, FORMER MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SERVANTS, AND TRADITIONAL TITLEHOLDERS ABOUT PRESIDENT IBRAHIM BABANGIDA'S HISTORIC DECISION TO REGISTER TWO POLITICAL PARTIES OF HIS OWN CREATION. INTERLOCUTORS AGREED THAT, WHILE A DEFT SURPRISE, THE DECISION WAS TOO IDEALISTIC, I.E., THE NEW POLITICAL STRUCTURES WILL NEVER BE IMMUNE TO THE NIGERIAN ENVIRONMENT OF TRIBAL, ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND REGIONAL PARTISANSHIP, THE "MONEYBAGS" AND CORRUPTION. SEVERAL COMMENTATORS OPINED THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS NOW SHIFTED HIS VISION TO "GUIDED DEMOCRACY" WITH LONG-TERM MILITARY SUPERVISION AND A SUSTAINED THREAT OF INTERVENTION. NOTWITHSTANDING SUCH OPINIONS, ALL WILL JOIN ONE OF THE TWO NEW PARTIES AND SOME WILL ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN PARTY AFFAIRS. REPRESENTATIVE VIEWS FROM FOUR INDIVIDUALS ARE PRESENTED. END SUMMARY.

BENUE STATE

¶2. BANNED POLITICIAN PAUL UNONGO, FORMER MINISTER OF MINES, POWER AND STEEL IN THE SHAGARI REGIME AND DEFEATED NPP CANDIDATE IN THE 1983 BENUE STATE GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS, HAS BEEN IN THE BACKGROUND OF ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS IN BENUE STATE OF THE NOW-DISSOLVED PEOPLES SOLIDARITY PARTY (PSP). UNONGO STATED THAT THERE ARE THREE THEORIES ABOUT BABANGIDA'S DECISION. THE "CONSPIRACY THEORY" ASSERTS THAT THE PRESIDENT'S INTENTION TO REMAIN IN POWER HAS BEEN MANIFESTED CONTINUOUSLY SINCE THE 1985 COUP THROUGHSHIS SYSTEMATIC ELIMINATION OF OPPONENTS. THE ABOLISHMENT OF THE ARMED FORCES RULING COUNCIL (AE) AND ITS RECONSTITUTION AS A SMALLER GROUP AND THE FREQUENT REPLACEMENT OF GOVERNORS ARE CITED AS RECENT EVIDENCE. THEORISTS CLAIM THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TWO NEW PARTIES BEHOLDEN Y TO H M IS HIS LATEST MANEUVER.

THE "IDEALIST THEORY" POSITS THE OPPOSITE, THAT PRESIDENT BABANGIDA IS SINCERE IN HIS DESIREJ BREAK WITH THE PAST AND ESTABLISH A FIRM FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE THIRD REPUBLIC AND THAT HE BELIEVES HE CAN ACHIEVE THIS GOAL THROUGH THE TWO NEW PARTIES. HIS DECISION REFLECTS HIS FRUSTRATION WITH BOTH OLD AND NEW BREED POLITICIANS AND HIS DESIRE TO LET THE IGERIAOEOPLE DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES. IN SHORT, HE SHOULD BE TAKEN AT HIS WORD.

LASTLY, THE "THEORY OF GUIDED DEMOCRACY" CENTERS ON THE BELIEF THAT BABANGIDA WILL REMAIN IN SOME AS YET UNSPECIFIED ROLE, OR PERMIT HIMSELF TO BE DRAFTED AS PVSIDENT, TO EXERT MILITARY GUIDANCE, REWARDS AND PUNISHMENT OVER THE THIRD REPUBLIC. HE RECOGNIZES THATHD IGERIA IS NOT READY FOR FULL DEMOCRACY AND WILL NEED "GUIDANCE" FOR AT LEAST TEN TO TWENTY YEARS, SAY THIS THEORY'S PROPONENTS.

13. UNONGO SUBSCRIBES TO THE LATTER THEORY BUT WOULD NOT CONJECTURE HOW BABANGIDA WOULD DO IT. THIS WILL NOT PREVENT THE DEFUNCT PSP FROM JOINING EN MASSE THE NEW SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (SDP), HE SAID. THE EX-PEOPLE'S FRONT OF NIGERIA (PFN) WILL DO SO AS WELL BECAUSE THE PSP AND PFN WILL STICK TO THEIR PRE-DECISION DEAL, ENGINEERED BY HIMSELF AND ALHAJI SHEHU YAR'ADUA, WHICH SPECIFIED THAT THE LOSER AMONG THE TWO WOULD JOIN THE WINNER AFTER REGISTRATION. TOGETHER WITH THE FORMER LIBERAL PARTY (LP) THE NEW SDP "WELFARISTS" WILL FACE THE NATIONAL REPUBLICAN CONVENTION (NRC), THE PARTY OF "PRIMORDIAL CAPITALISTS."

14. COMMENT: UNONGO IS A DYNAMIC, YOUTHFUL-APPEARING POLITICIAN WHO APPEARS TO ENJOY A LOYAL FOLLOWING AMONG THE TIV PEOPLE IN NORTHERN BENUE STATE. AT A LUNCHEON AT HIS RESIDENCE IN GBOKO, STATE-WIDE PSP OPERATIVES DEFIANTLY PLEDGED TO ROUND UP THEIR SUPPORTERS TO REGISTER SDP AND TO TAKE OVER AT STATE CONVENTIONS, TELLING CONGEN THAT THEY WOULD BEAT BAGANGIDA AT HIS OWN GAME. UNONGO BASKED IN THEIR HOMAGE, CLEARLY INTENDING TO CONTINUE HIS BEHIND-THE-SCENES ROLE AT THE STATE AND NATIONAL LEVELS. END COMMENT.

15. MR. IYORKOHOL AKURE, THE PRESIDENT OF THE BENUE STATE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRY, AGRICULTURE AND MINES, WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF BABANDIGA'S DECISION. THE NEC GUIDELINES FOR REGISTRATION WERE IMPOSSIBLE, HE STATED, WITH THE TIME TOO SHORT, THE DOCUMENTARY REQUIREMENTS ONEROUS, THE RANGE TOO BROAD, AND THE COSTS PROHIBITIVE. THE TWO NEW PARTIES MIRROR THE DISSOLVED PSP AND NIGERIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (NNC) IN OUTLOOK AND PHILOSOPHY, AND IN FREE ELECTIONS WITH ALL 13 POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS CONTESTING AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL THEY WOULD HAVE PREVAILED, HE MAINTAINED. WHAT THEN IS THE EFFICACY OF THIS DECISION, HE ASKED. HE CONTINUED THAT IT ONLY SHOWS BABANGIDA'S LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE NIGERIA POLITY, HIS THEORETICAL AND IMPRACTICAL APPROACH TO POLITICAL PROBLEMS, AND ABOVE ALL HIS CONTEMPT FOR NIGERIAN CIVILIAN SOCIETY. THE PRESIDENT IS PREDISPOSED TO BELIEVE IN THE SUPERIORITY OF THE MILITARY AGAINST ALL EVIDENCE OF POOR JUDGMENT AND SIMPLISTIC THOUGHT, HE OPINED. IN SUM, THE RESULTS OF THE LIFTING OF THE BAN ON POLITICS, THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS, AND THE NEC VERIFICATION EXERCISE WERE DEGRADING AND DISILLUSIONING.

NEVERTHELESS, AKURE SAID, THE PSP NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE IS RESIGNED TO THE NEW REALITY AND WILL ENJOIN ITS FOLLOWERS TO REGISTER WITH THE SDP. ON OCTOBER 2, 1992 - ONE DAY AFTER THE RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE - THE SDP WILL REWRITE ITS MANIFESTO TO REFLECT PSP VIEWS, RENDERING BANBANGIDA'S MOVE A PYRRHIC VICTORY, HE CLAIMED.

16. COMMENT: AKURE'S VIEWS, COMING ONE DAY AFTER THE PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT, WERE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE WIDESPREAD INITIAL CONSTERNATION AND DISAPPOINTMENT AMONG BENUE STATE PSP ADHERENTS THAT THEIR ASSOCIATION HAD LOST OUT. AS ELSEWHERE THE DECISION WAS SOON VIEWED AS JUST ONE MORE CHALLENGE THRUST UPON THEM BY BABANGIDA, WHICH WOULD NOT, HOWEVER, ALTER THE FUNDAMENTAL NATURE OF NIGERIAN POLITICS. END COMMENT.

GONGOLA STATE

17. ALHAJI BAMANGA MUHAMMED TUKUR - ELECTED CIVILIAN GOVERNOR OF GONGOLA STATE (1983), FORMER GENERAL MANAGER OF THE NIGERIAN PORTS AUTHORITY (1975-82), PROMINENT BUSINESSMAN, AND TRADITIONAL TITLEHOLDER (THE WAKILI CHAMBA) - WAS EQUALLY CRITICAL OF THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION. TO HIM, THE NEW TWO PARTY SYSTEM, RATIFIED BY THE COERCIVE "POWER-OF-THE-GUN," IS AN ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE IDEAS, FEELINGS, AND LOYALTIES IN THE PRACTICE OF DEMOCRACY. HOWEVER, TRUE DEMOCRACY MUST SPRING FROM THE PEOPLE, WHICH EVEN THE U.S.S.R. AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES ARE REALIZING, AND NEEDS TIME TO DEVELOP, HE SAID. IT MUST GROW FROM INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND WANTS COALESCING WITH OTHERS INTO GROUP DEMANDS AND THE FORMULATION OF ASSOCIATIONS TO ACHIEVE COMMON GOALS

THROUGH POLITICAL ACTION, HE MAINTAINED. THERE WILL BE NO DEVELOPMENT IF AS A PEOPLE WE ARE NOT ALLOWED TO LEARN TO GOVERN OURSELVES, TO MAKE MISTAKES, AND TO LEARN FROM THEM, HE STATED.

INSTEAD, HE SAID, THE DECISION FORCES PEOPLE TO THINK GOVERNMENT'S IDEAS, ACCEPT ITS VIEWS, AND OPERATE WITHIN ITS PRESCRIBED PARAMETERS. MOREOVER, IT REINFORCES THE IDEA OF THE INEVITABILITY AND ACCEPTABILITY OF MILITARY RULE, HE CONTINUED. ECHOING A THEME REPEATEDLY HEARD, TUKUR SAID THAT THE MILITARY HAS RULED NIGERIA FOR 21-PLUS YEARS OF ITS 29 YEARS OF EXISTENCE. THOSE FEW SHORT YEARS OF CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION WERE INSUFFICIENT TO LEARN THE LESSONS OF DEMOCRACY, HE SAID, BUT THE LONG YEARS OF MILITARY CONTROL HAVE TAUGHT THAT THE POWER OF COERCION IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS TO RULE. THE NEW DECISION, CONTEMPTUOUS AND HUMILIATING, SHOWS BABANGIDA'S TRUE COLORS - A DEMAGOGUE, CONVINCED OF THE MILITARY'S SUPERIORITY, WHO WANTS TO REMAIN IN POWER.

18. TUKUR CRITICIZED THE POLITICAL ASSOCIATION EXERCISE AS A USELESS WASTE OF TIME AND MONEY. THE NEC REPORT MIMICRED THE FMG'S VIEW THAT ALL CIVILIAN POLITICAL GROUPS AND POLITICIANS, OLD AND NEW ALIKE, ARE UNTRUSTWORTHY BECAUSE BY THEIR VERY NATURE THEY OPPOSE THE SUPREMACY OF THE MILITARY, HE SAID. THE DECISION THUS PERPETUATES THE IDEA THAT MILITARY RULE IS ACCEPTABLE, WHILE DISCREDITING THE EDUCATED AND EXPERIENCED CIVILIAN LEADERS. IN EFFECT, THEN, THERE ARE ONLY TWO GROUPS IN NIGERIA - THE MILITARY AND EVERYONE ELSE; THESE SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE TWO PARTIES AND THE PEOPLE ALLOWED TO DECIDE, HE SUGGESTED.

AS FOR THE NEW LEFT/RIGHT DICHOTOMY, TUKUR OPINED THAT NIGERIA COULD NEVER BE TRULY LEFTIST BECAUSE IT IS TOO DIVERSE, INSUFFICIENTLY DEVELOPED, AND CULTURALLY OPPOSED. THE TRADITIONS OF CHIEFTANCY, RESPECT FOR ELDERS, THE EDUCATED LEADING THE UNEDUCATED, AND THE EXPERIENCED AS GUIDES CANNOT BE ABOLISHED BY MILITARY FIAT. MOREOVER, THE NIGERIAN PEOPLE ARE CAPITALISTS, BUSINESS-ORIENTED, AND FREE-THINKING, SO SOCIALIST AND COLLECTIVIST IDEAS WILL NOT PROSPER, HE SAID. EVEN SO, THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOW IMPOSE IDEAS BASED ON THE THINKING OF BUREAUCRATS CONTROLLED BY THE MILITARY, SO ONE CANNOT TELL. IN ANY CASE, MEMBERS OF THE NEW PARTIES WILL HAVE NO LOYALTY TO THE PARTY STRUCTURES OR THEIR IDEALS BECAUSE THEY WILL NOT HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THEIR DEVELOPMENT, HE CONCLUDED.

19. COMMENT: ALHAJI TUKUR REFLECTS VIEWS COMMON AMONG NORTHERN TRADITIONAL ELITES - COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY TEMPERED BY LEADERSHIP BY THE ARISTOCRACY. END COMMENT.

110. ALHAJI ADAMU IBRAHIM, FORMER LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHAIRMAN OF BALI, GONGOLA STATE, GAVE VIEWS FROM A DIFFERENT, MORE GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVE. THE PFN, HE SAID, HAD BEEN STRONGER IN HIS AREA THAN ANY OTHER POLITICAL ASSOCIATION. ITS LEADERSHIP HAD BEEN "NEW BREED" BUT FOLLOWED PFN'S DELI FROM THE NATIONAL LEVEL. HE WORRIES THAT THE NEC REPORT AND THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS AND DECISION SO CRITICIZED THESE BUDDING POLITICIANS THAT THEY WILL NOW OPT OUT. HAVING BEEN ELECTED IN DECEMBER 1987 ON PERSONAL MERIT, IBRAHIM HAD WANTED TO JOIN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHAIRMEN, BUT THERE WAS NO OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE IN GONGOLA STATE, GIVEN POOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INSUFFICIENT TIME. HE BELIEVES THAT VOTERS WOULD FOLLOW HIM IF HE WERE TO INDICATE STRONG INTEREST AND PREFERENCE FOR ONE OF THE NEW PARTIES, BUT HE HAS DECIDED TO SIT IT OUT RATHER THAN HAVE A POLITICAL PROGRAM IMPOSED UPON HIM. (HE IS NOW GONGOLA STATE'S LIAISON OFFICER IN KADUNA.) HE SUSPECTS THAT THE SDP WILL DO WELL, GIVEN ITS WELFARE STANCE, BUT THAT THE NRC WILL BE VIEWED AS "MORE ISLAMIC." IN THE END, PREFERENCE WILL BE DEPENDENT ON WHICH WAY THE STATE AND NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GO, HE SAID.

111. COMMENT: ONE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCE OF BABANGIDA'S DECISION MAY BE TO DRIVE OUT SOME OF THE MORE IDEALISTIC

POLITICAL NEOPHYTES WHO JOINED IN THE POLITICAL
ASSOCIATION FORMATION EXERCISE. THE DISILLUSIONMENT
EXPRESSED BY ALHAJI IBRAHIM IS REPRESENTATIVE OF MANY
VIEWS CONGEN HEARD FROM MIDDLE-LEVEL GOVERNMENT AND
BUSINESS CONTACTS DURING THE VISIT TO BENUE AND GONGOLA
STATES. END COMMENT.

HOLMES